
THE HALF OF MY GOODS * *

An Easter Play By
Ralph Claggett

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A N E A S T E R P L A Y

by

Ralph P. Claggett



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"THE HALF OF MY GOODS"

An Easter Play

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C H A R A C T E R S

Zacchaeus

Patricia - his wife

Matthew - his friend, a publican

Thaddeus - his son, in early twenties

Miriam, his daughter, in early teens

Rebecca - his servant

A Roman Centurian

Foreword

Little is known of Zacchaeus. The biblical account of his life informs us that he was a Jewish collector of revenues for the Roman Government. We may infer that he was short of stature, for he climbed a tree that he might see Jesus as he passed along the way. We know that Jesus dined with him. And we suspect that the hour or so this tax collector spent with the Nazarene transformed his whole life; for as Jesus was about to depart, Zacchaeus announced he would restore four-fold to all whom he had wronged, and even divide the half of his goods with the poor.

The facts recorded are not sufficient to convey the struggle which went on in the heart of this Jewish official. It is certain that he had a home of some sort, perhaps with a socially ambitious wife out of the Hellenistic world, a charming little daughter, and a son not altogether to his liking. What is to hinder us from supposing that he, himself, wanted to be honest, but was urged on to illegitimate gain by the Greek whom he had married? Perhaps a crisis of some sort was at hand in Zacchaeus' life-career as Jesus came toward his home. It may be he was well-nigh desperate at the time and was prevented from some irrational act only by the opportune arrival of his friend Matthew, whom he had known at the place of toll. Be that as it may, there were motives at work

in the life of this Jew which caused him to reverse both his inner attitude toward life and his outward conduct toward men. This drama presents an effort to show forth those motives and to move men of this generation, men who are honest, and men who are dishonest, to live in keeping with the character of Jesus of Nazareth.

A C T O N E

Time: Just before the Passover at the close of Jesus' life.

Scene: An apartment in the home of Zacchaeus and Patricia. It bears the marks of the Hellenistic world of Patricia. The walls are of white sandstone, marked off with dark mortar. The appointments are quite in keeping with Patricia's character. Rich draperies hang at the two windows; the one at the rear right, the other at the right center. Hangings of like character are at the two doors; right front and left rear. A window seat is built in at the rear right and shelves line the wall at the rear left. On these shelves are standing Greek statuettes, a pitcher and several tumblers. In the middle center a high-backed bench stands, Grecian in design, with drapes to harmonize with the hangings at the doors and windows. At either side of the bench, slightly farther front, two stools are placed, covered with material like that on the bench. As the curtain rises, PATRICIA is seen hemming some fine linens and MIRIAM is reading from a Greek manuscript.

PATRICIA: What art thou reading, child?

MIRIAM: One of the writings of thy Greek fathers, Mother.

PATRICIA: Good! Thou canst not know too well the tales of Homer.

MIRIAM: But this one is the story of Xenophon, Mother.

PATRICIA: One of our great military leaders, Miriam, whose campaigns are of interest to all.

MIRIAM: Did my brother, Thaddeus, read these writings, Mother?

PATRICIA: Aye. Hours he spent boylike, reveling in the military triumphs of my people.

MIRIAM: Thaddeus would make a wonderful soldier, would he not, Mother?

PATRICIA: That he would!

MIRIAM: He is so big and brave and strong.

PATRICIA: If thou couldst see thy brother clad in armor, all bright and shining, then wouldst thou be proud of him!

MIRIAM: How could I think more of him than I do now, Mother?

PATRICIA: Wait till he becomes a famous general and the scribes write his praise. Then thou shalt see!

MIRIAM: But what would father say?

PATRICIA: Were there not soldiers among the Hebrews?

MIRIAM: (as if reciting a lesson) Aye, Joshua and Gideon and Saul and David, and many, many others.

PATRICIA: Then, why should he care?

MIRIAM: Why, thou knowest, Mother, father wants Thaddeus to work with him at the place of toll.

PATRICIA: That, Miriam, was a dream of father's that

has long since passed from his mind.

MIRIAM: Then father would let Thaddeus become a soldier?

PATRICIA: I know not. Yet far rather would I have Thaddeus known as a Greek bearing Roman arms, than as a Jew collecting Roman taxes.

MIRIAM: Why, Mother?

PATRICIA: I cannot tell thee now, child; thou wouldst not understand.

MIRIAM: Is it wrong to be a Jew?

PATRICIA: Not wrong, perhaps, but if thou art known as a Jew, it will not add to thy social standing.

MIRIAM (troubled) Should I not tell, then, that my father is a Jew?

PATRICIA: Tell them thou art of Greek descent.

MIRIAM: (loyally) But I love my father, and I care not that he is a Jew. (She sobs quietly)

PATRICIA (rising and going to her): There, my child, I love thee for thy loyalty, and thou must forget thy mother's words. A little later thou wilt understand. And, now, dry thine eyes lest thy father find thee in tears. Hast thou finished helping Rebecca with the dusting?

MIRIAM: No, Mother, I will go at once. (Glances toward door, joyously) Here is my father, coming now. (She runs out quickly; speaking off stage) Dear Father! (Patricia drops, restlessly, on the window-seat, apparently disquieted by her conversation with Miriam)

PATRICIA (abstractly as ZACCHAEUS enters): Thou art

late, today, Zachaeus. What has kept thee?

ZACCHAEUS: The day has been a heavy one. Never have I seen the place of toll more crowded. (He sinks heavily into bench at right, giving signs of extreme weariness)

PATRICIA (rising, standing near bench, and looking down on him): The crowds seem ever to weary thee, my husband, and yet should they be welcome, for it is when the place of toll is crowded with folk that thy gain is heaviest.

ZACCHAEUS: True, Patricia. The crowds ought not to wear on me, for, as thou sayest, their presence bringeth gain.

PATRICIA: Especially, when amongst them, there are a number of the rich like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea.

ZACCHAEUS: Aye, and they were there today. They came with full hands, and I sent them away empty.

PATRICIA: Then, a number of the rich paid their assessments?

ZACCHAEUS: They came, and they paid, 'tis true, and they paid far, far more than they intended.

PATRICIA: Tell me, Zachaeus, thou didst not outwit the young Nicodemus to add to thy treasure? (Sits on stool at right).

ZACCHAEUS: Nay, Patricia, but that inexperienced youth will not hold for long the wealth his father bequeathed him.

PATRICIA: Better far would it be in thy hands, my lord, than in the hands of some unscrupulous Roman.

ZACCHAEUS: (with veiled sarcasm): Thinkest thou it would add not a little to our happiness?

PATRICIA: For you, Zacchaeus, 'twould mean prestige at the Roman Court, and for me, advancement to a place that is socially fitting to my race. (looks forward into space, entranced with the thought of what wealth would mean.)

ZACCHAEUS: (sarcasm more evident in his voice): Yet thou mayest not need Nicodemus' estate, oh wife of mine, to attain thy heart's desire.

PATRICIA (joyously): Meanest thou that good fortune has come to us?

ZACCHAEUS: The balance sheet at the place of toll, my Grecian Lady, shows thou art ten thousand denarii nearer thy goal. (said wearily, as though this report had become monotonous through much repetition)

PATRICIA: Ten thousand denarii. A few more days like this, and I shall be able to boast as many slaves as Pilate's household. (She springs to her feet, crying joyously) Bravo, my Zacchaeus, soon shall the world be at our feet!

ZACCHAEUS: Aye, but such a world as it is. (Turns indifferently away, showing signs of disgust)

PATRICIA: (going to Zacchaeus, standing at back of bench, and playing with his hair): Art thou not at ease in it? Remember, how thou has been favored by the Roman. And think how the gods have blessed thee in thy daughter Miriam, who loves thee dearly, and thy son Thaddeus, through whom thy name shall endure forever.

ZACCHAEUS (drawing himself away from the hands of Patricia as though she irritated him): Dost thou think I care to be remembered through that shiftless

creature, who lives off his mother's bounty?

PATRICIA (with dignity in bearing and voice):
Zacchaeus, thou shalt not speak thus of our son.

ZACCHAEUS (bitterly): And why not? Naught that I can
say or do can work him harm.

PATRICIA: If thou carest not for thy son, consider
Miriam, and thy wife. For us, thou shalt have wealth,
Zacchaeus, wealth! (some of the joy has passed from
her voice, and she speaks as though urging on a
reluctant child).

ZACCHAEUS: So I shall have wealth? (Rises and faces
Patricia as she comes forward from rear of bench.
He draws a coin from his garments.) Seest thou this
denarius? 'Tis Caesar's! Yet somewhere in our law,
it is written "Thou shalt not make unto thee graven
images, nor shalt thou bow down thyself unto them,
nor serve them."

PATRICIA: The words of Moses, but what knew he of the
life and times in which we live?

ZACCHAEUS: (still gazing intently at coin): 'Tis
Caesar's, but as oft as I look upon it, I see those
gaunt haggard faces at the place of toll. They haunt
me night and day.

PATRICIA: Well, what of it? Is it not also written
in thy law, that the good shall prosper and the evil
perish? (Her face and manner show contempt, as she
partially turns from him).

ZACCHAEUS: Aye, but who am I that I should extort
from them more than is appointed unto me? Who am I,
that I should banish my own people to the hell of
poverty? (Sinks dejectedly on bench).

PATRICIA: What thou needest, my husband, is to try to

forget the cares of the day. (Goes to the shelf at rear, fills a goblet, and brings it to husband) Here, drink and refresh thyself. (Zacchaeus drinks and his face relaxes. As if throwing off unwelcome thoughts, he rises, approaches his wife, and lifts his goblet a second time for a toast).

ZACCHAEUS: Here is to the health and happiness, yea, even the wealth of my Grecian Queen. Long may she live in regal splendor!

THADDEUS (who has entered, right, during toast): 'Tis well enough to toast thy noble wife, oh, most clever Father, but what of thy son?

ZACCHAEUS: (turns, faces his son and speaks with reproach): Dost imply there is in thee, thou vagabond, qualities like unto those that grace thy mother?

THADDEUS (speaks lightly, with air of braggart): Verily, thou hast a keen mind, my Father. From whom else but the Greek did I inherit this haughty bearing that brings the Samaritan to my feet; this gracious courtesy that gives the Roman pause; this facile tongue that outwits e'en the wily easterner?

ZACCHAEUS (with the note of a cynic in his voice): So thou thinkest thou art like thy mother in manner and wit? And for these, I should boast of thee in court and market place among the rulers and merchants?

THADDEUS: Nay, my Father, in manner and wit I may be Greek, but in cleverness, I am altogether Jew. (Bows before his father, with courtly manner). Boast of thy clever son. The rulers will understand. (Laughs insinuatingly, then walks to window and looks out nervously).

PATRICIA (going to Zacchaeus, putting her hand on his shoulder and speaking proudly) Thaddeus is right, Zacchaeus, there is in him that blending of Greek

and Hebrew that will carry him far in the Roman world.

THADDEUS (turning from the window and lifting his hand to his mother in approval): Thou sayest, Mother, thou sayest. And so it shall be. Soon shalt thou have thy heart's desire. Thy Thaddeus is to become rich and powerful; a man of great influence to whom the world will bow. (Throws back head and shoulders proudly).

PATRICIA: Blessings on thee, my son, Thou mayest well surpass thy father if he take not heed to his way. (She takes goblet from Zacchaeus and returns it to shelf. Thaddeus again steps to the window and watches, cautiously, unobserved by his parents.)

ZACCHAEUS (with irony in his voice): Has my son won greater favor with Pilate than I, who am his financial agent? (to Patricia): What enterprise is his, Patricia, that he is so soon to have wealth in excess of mine?

PATRICIA: Be seated, Thaddeus, and tell us of thy venture. (Thaddeus sits on stool at right; Zacchaeus and Patricia on bench).

THADDEUS (with an air of authority and importance): To Jerusalem, whence I was, there has but recently come a mighty merchant prince. With him, is a retinue of servants like unto the sands of the sea. His caravan is laden with the grain of Egypt, the spices of India and the gold of Ophir. To protect his caravan from those who might plunder along the way, he retains a guard of mighty men. And I, my Father, have been made captain of the guard.

ZACCHAEUS: (sceptically): So this merchant prince pays the captain of his guard a princely sum, does he, that will soon make our son wealthy?

PATRICIA: Nay, Zacchaeus, thou dost not understand. Thaddeus, no doubt, has won the favor of this mighty man of wealth, and will surely benefit greatly from it.

THADDEUS (confidently): 'Tis true, Mother. Already he has promised me advancement, and soon, so he hath said, I shall be as a son to him, sharing with him in all his earnings.

ZACCHAEUS (still unconvinced): Earnings from merchandising accrue but slowly, my son. I see no rapid advance to wealth and influence through this venture.

PATRICIA: It may be, Zacchaeus, that this merchant prince will deign to share his wealth with our son, upon whom he looks with such favor.

THADDEUS (producing bag of gold from his garments): 'Tis quite so, my Mother. Even as I left he thrust this bag of gold into my hand, saying, "Take this and show it to thy father in pledge of what I shall do for thee."

(A ROMAN CENTURIAN enters the room suddenly.

THADDEUS jumps to his feet guiltily, and the bag of gold drops to the floor with a dull thud.

ZACCHAEUS rises in astonishment, and PATRICIA draws herself up as if resenting the intrusion)

ROMAN CENTURIAN: Your pardon, sir.

THADDEUS: Explain your mission.

ROMAN CENTURIAN: (looking sternly at Thaddeus who looks about for means of escape): The highways which pass in and out of your city have been made unsafe to caravans within recent months by a desperate robber band headed by Barabbas.

PATRICIA (with proud confidence) And Thaddeus has

won favor to himself by driving off these robbers!

ROMAN CENTURIAN: Yesterday, a mighty merchant from Egypt traveled northward through Jerusalem. In his caravan, he carried much grain and spices and gold.

PATRICIA (anticipating the Roman in his story): 'Twas this caravan in which our son was traveling.

ZACCHAEUS: Be still, woman; say on, sir.

ROMAN CENTURIAN (continuing as though uninterrupted): The caravan was attacked by Parabbas and the spoil divided before the band retreated to the hills. (He pauses just a moment, then speaks decisively) And that bag of gold, sir, marks your son as a member of this robber band!

THADDEUS (attempting an air of bravado): It is not true.

PATRICIA (angered): Thaddeus, my son Thaddeus, a common thief? How darest thou say it?

ROMAN CENTURIAN: And that spot of blood on his cloak, sir, marks your son as the murderer of the merchant prince. (Thaddeus tries to conceal the stain).

PATRICIA: A murderer? Oh Thaddeus, Thaddeus, that I should live to see this day! (turning to her son and speaking passionately) Oh, tell thy mother that it is not so. (A moment's tense silence. Thaddeus wilts beneath his mother's penetrating look, then drops his head.)

ZACCHAEUS (angry at first and then utterly grief-stricken): Oh, my God, my God! Why has thou forsaken me? (He sinks upon the bench.)

ROMAN CENTURIAN: I must take him, sir.

THADDEUS (to CENTURIAN): One moment, sir. (bitterly to Zacchaeus): He has called me a thief, and so I am. But who was it taught me to steal? Oft as a lad I stood at the place of toll and watched you defraud the ignorant and laugh as you pocketed your gain. And oft as a young man, I have seen you double and triple a poor widow's assessment, till her anxiety brought her death. I am not alone at fault. (a pause) Hast thou no answer to that? (The righteous scorn for a hypocrite shows in his voice).

PATRICIA (through her tears): Thaddeus! Dost forget thou has been taught to honor thy father? As a collector of revenues thy father is held in esteem by all. It is not for such as thou art - (breaks down weeping)

THADDEUS (bitterly): So, not only my father, but my mother casts me off. (Picks up his bloodstained cloak, and looks at it, speaking with hopeless remorse). (To Centurian) Well, I am ready. (He lets garment fall listlessly and turns with hopeless manner toward the officer.)

PATRICIA (rushing to son and clinging to him): Oh, my son, my son, tell me it is not true. There must be some mistake. Just one word that I may believe.

THADDEUS (pushing her gently away, still bitterly) Caesar makes no mistake. Behind, thy son - liar, thief, murderer!
(Followed by the Centurian, he leaves the room without a backward glance. His father's eyes follow him, unseeing. His mother sinks, weeping, to a seat.)

A C T T W O

Time: Late afternoon the next day.

Scene: The same. As the curtain rises PATRICIA is discovered sitting on the window bench weeping. She rises, goes to window at right and peers anxiously out into the court yard. She turns to pace across the room, giving every evidence of nervous excitement and anxiety. As ZACCHAEUS enters at right, she rushes to him, flinging herself in his arms.

PATRICIA: Oh, my husband, thou hast come, thou hast come! It seemed I could no longer wait. Tell me that Pilate gave ear to thy petition.

ZACCHAEUS (attempts to calm her, stroking her hair): Thou hast had a hard day, my wife. These anxious hours have told upon thee.

PATRICIA: My heart has been heavy within me. To think that my boy who was so innocent, so pure, my Thaddeus of whom I was so proud should have come to this! (She weeps on his shoulder)

ZACCHAEUS (whose face gives evidence of much suffering): Spare thy tears, woman.

PATRICIA (drawing away and looking up at him through her tears): Thou meanest that the Roman will pardon our son?

ZACCHAEUS (leading her to bench where he seats her, ignoring her question): If tears there are to be, it is for me to weep.

PATRICIA: Nay, little didst thou care for the lad. Thou wast ever given to thy business. (Zacchaeus accepts her words with dull resignation, as if he had already suffered to the limit of his capacity) 'Twas I who cared for him; 'twas I who loved him. (She weeps again, this time in self-pity)

ZACCHAEUS: Then must thou be brave.

PATRICIA (startled, looks up quickly at her husband)
Tell me not thy journey was in vain.

ZACCHAEUS (Hopelessly): For once it seems the Roman
court will not be moved by wealth nor name.

PATRICIA: Thou didst have audience with Pilate?

ZACCHAEUS: Even so, the governor readily gave me ear.

PATRICIA: Was he not moved to leniency by thy petition?

ZACCHAEUS: His heart was touched, but the law could
not change. (He slumps despairingly in his seat)

PATRICIA: Thou didst remind him that gold means nothing to us?

ZACCHAEUS: He listened not. "A murderer self-confessed" said he, "must die a murderer's death".

PATRICIA: But Thaddeus meant it not. (She grasps her husband nervously by the arm) Thou didst tell Pilate 'twas said in a moment of despair?

ZACCHAEUS: Thus spake I and the governor summoned the lad, but Thaddeus refused to speak.

PATRICIA (frightened): Tell me not he was silent when speech might mean escape from death.

ZACCHAEUS: A strange sullenness possessed him.

PATRICIA: Think you he careth not to live?

ZACCHAEUS (sorrowfully): His look was that of one
who hath drunk life to the dregs and hath found it bitter.

PATRICIA (protesting with real sincerity): That cannot be, Zacchaeus. Through these years he hath had all that wealth and culture could bring.

ZACCHAEUS: Mayhap 'tis for that very reason life palls upon him. Like a child he wearies of life's playthings and casts them all aside.

PATRICIA: Why this should be I cannot understand. His home, his learning, e'en life itself were his from thee. He owes thee much, Zacchaeus.

ZACCHAEUS (flinches, draws away, rises to his feet, and speaks bitterly): His indebtedness to me, Patricia, consists of naught save a character like unto that of Barabbas.

PATRICIA: Thou shalt not speak thus, my husband.

ZACCHAEUS: Nay, I cannot repress the truth which rankles in my breast.

PATRICIA (rises and moves toward Zacchaeus): 'Tis not the truth! Thou shalt not so much as think it.

ZACCHAEUS (staying her with a gesture): Dost choose to forget the charge thy son flung against his sire in thy very presence?

PATRICIA (in half-hearted protest): Oh my husband, 'twas said in a fit of anger.

ZACCHAEUS (speaking with conviction): Nay, Patricia, 'twas said in honest condemnation of a worthless life. Thaddeus is right. If either of us should bear the name of thief, 'tis I. Sheltered by my office and the Roman court, I have drained the purse of rich and poor alike.

PATRICIA (obliged to recognize his guilt, sinks on stool at his feet and sobs): Oh my husband, my

husband.

ZACCHAEUS: Nor is that all. Oft when our Thaddeus was but a lad I took him to the place of toll that he might see his clever father at work and admire the more. Oh God, I know it now. If thief he is, 'tis I who made him so. (Rises, goes to rear right)

PATRICIA (conscience-stricken): May, my, Zacchaeus, mine is the greater blame; I am the guilty one. 'Twas I who spurred thee on to reap where thou hadst not sowed.

ZACCHAEUS (without heeding Patricia, he draws a dagger from his garments and speaks as if to himself): This blade is keen. (He fingers the blade a moment) A stroke and I shall end remorse.

MATTHEW (enters through door at right, speaking joyously): Hail, hail my friend. Behold I bring thee good tidings of great joy.

ZACCHAEUS (replacing dagger, he steps forward to meet his friend, thereby shielding Patricia who passes to rear of bench wiping her eyes): What news hast thou, friend Matthew, that could bring cheer to this household?

MATTHEW (aware of the tense situation into which he has come, purposely keeping note of joy in his voice) Jesus of Nazareth passeth this way and would dine with thee.

ZACCHAEUS (indifferently): The teacher who summoned thee from the place of toll?

MATTHEW: Aye, the same. And great was my joy when his consent was given that I might seek audience with thee.

PATRICIA (stepping forward with forced composure):

Wilt thou not be sested, Matthew? And thou, Zacchaeus. (Matthew takes bench while the other two occupy the stools at his right and left.) Then thou deemest it a favor, Matthew, that this Galilian carpenter whose companions smell of the sea should dine with us? (pride in her voice and bearing with a bit of disdain evident)

MATTHEW: Woman, what knowest thou of him? (Matthew purposely leads Patricia to think of something other than her own trouble)

PATRICIA: Enough, perchance, to bring in question the social honor of his presence as a guest in our household.

MATTHEW: Thou hast listened to the talk of the Jerusalem Pharisees?

PATRICIA (contemptuously): Aye, and have heard how the Nazarene consorts with Mary Magdalene and her kind.

MATTHEW: Said they naught, Patricia, of the Master's teaching?

PATRICIA (indifferently): Naught save that 'twill lead to the violation of your Jewish customs, which concerns me not.

MATTHEW: Zacchaeus, thou hast an ear for news. What is being said at the place of toll? (Zacchaeus has been gazing off into space, his head in his hands, scarcely listening. He is startled and hesitates before speaking.)

ZACCHAEUS: About thy teacher?

MATTHEW: Aye.

ZACCHAEUS: (indifferently): In general the talk is

favorable to the Nazarene.

MATTHEW: Then it follows not the thought of the Pharisee?

ZACCHAEUS (disinterestedly) Rather, the suspicion is abroad that the Pharisee waxes jealous of the following of this Jesus.

MATTHEW: Aha! What more?

ZACCHAEUS (speaks with an effort): 'Tis thought that the Pharisee is fearful lest the loss of his influence over the people lead to his loss of prestige with the Roman.

MATTHEW: Then the Master has great influence with the people?

ZACCHAEUS (trying to make the best of a hard situation) Some think of him as a teacher with authority such as no Pharisee possesses. Others regard him with something of the reverence they hold for the prophets of old. And some even think that the cloak of Elijah has descended upon him.

MATTHEW (trying to rouse interest in Zacchaeus): Would that I might tell thee what the Twelve think!

ZACCHAEUS (his curiosity aroused): I have heard that the Zealots, knowing him to be a descendant of David would make him king of Israel. Do the Twelve think he will be king?

MATTHEW: More than that, Zacchaeus, far more; but what, I cannot tell thee. The Master has bid us tell no man.

PATRICIA (with interest in voice and manner): Matthew, tell us this if no more: what is there about this Jesus that claims thy allegiance?

MATTHEW: Kingly qualities the Master has, 'tis true. I wonder not that the Zealots think of him as king. His is a personal magnetism that draws men to him. The day he chose the Twelve, five hundred men and more were waiting, eager for the chance to follow, yea, to die for him.

ZACCHAEUS: Why is it, think you, that men are attracted to him?

MATTHEW: There is about his person the suggestion of power, limitless power that could move mountains into the sea if need be. But his kingliness consists of more than power. Thou, Patricia, art a mother and well couldst thou understand what suffering would be thine if little Miriam were sick unto death. Would that thou might have seen Jesus at the home of Jairus. The neighbors were a hopeless lot, filling the house with their weeping and wailing. Only Jesus seemed to know what that mother was suffering -- knew her need of quiet. So he drove them all out. Then with that calm assurance that always brings with it the hope of recovery, he entered the sick room. The little one lay on her couch, still and pale. He leaned over her and took her hand that she might feel the kindly warmth of his life. Then in a voice whose penetrating clearness that mother will never forget, he summoned the damsel back to new life. (warmly) The Master has power, Patricia, but more than that, he has sympathetic understanding of a mother's heart.

ZACCHAEUS: Clearly this Jesus of Nazareth is no ordinary man, Matthew, and well can I see the reason for his fame. But thou hast not yet told us what it was that first caused thee to follow him.

MATTHEW: Thou art truly interested to know, art thou, Zacchaeus?

ZACCHAEUS: More than words can say.

MATTHEW: And thou wilt not consider my words as reflection on thee should I speak frankly of myself?

ZACCHAEUS: At the place of toll thou knowest well, Matthew, we were ever honest with each other, no matter what our treatment of other men. (His head drops at thought of his dishonesty)

MATTHEW: Well, then, if thou wilt have it, the thing which first drew me to him was his fearless honesty. Dost remember, Zacchaeus, how I loathed myself as I practiced deceit day after day at the place of toll? 'Twas not so much that I violated the law of Moses as 'twas that I was untrue to my ideal of manhood.

ZACCHAEUS (nodding to show his understanding): Oft thou didst say as we talked, "Would that I might be as honest with all men as I am with thee, Zacchaeus."

MATTHEW (with animation): Aye, and well I knew it could be had I the will to break away, but neither the courage nor the strength were mine, not till I met Jesus!

ZACCHAEUS: At the time 'twas thought thy leaving was most hasty and ill considered.

MATTHEW: One look into the Master's clear, honest eye told me, somehow, that he understood. He knew I was no better than a common thief, yet he knew how I longed to live an honest life. Those words of his, "Come, follow me," brought me the courage and strength I was lacking. (He springs to his feet) Oh, my friend, at last I have broken away from that deceitful self. Now through his help I am an honest man.

ZACCHAEUS (with eager humility): Thinkest thou, Matthew, that thy Master would help even me as he has thee?

MATTHEW: 'Tis for that very reason, my friend, that I would have him meet thee.

ZACCHAEUS: But thou knowest not the depths to which I have sunk.

MATTHEW: I know this, Zacchaeus, that there is in my Master none of the haughty disdain for the unfortunate that lives in the hearts of those who pretend to be good.

ZACCHAEUS (with pathetic eagerness): Thinkest thou he will help a man who hath not only robbed the poor, but made of his own son a thief?

MATTHEW: Zacchaeus, thy plight is indeed a desperate one. The Roman Centurian, who but now sought help of Jesus for his servant, hath told me all.

PATRICIA: Then thou knowest all? Thou knowest all, yet hast thou come with thy word of cheer! Truly, Matthew, there is none like unto thee in Israel.

MATTHEW (humbly): It is my new Master's influence. Could I forsake thee now in thy so great sorrow? (He unites their hands, withdrawing to the window where he stands looking out into the court yard).

ZACCHAEUS (greatly moved, searches Patricia's eyes, seeking answer to his question): Wouldst thou mind, Patricia, if I should restore fourfold to those whom I have wronged, e'en if I should divide the half of my goods among the poor?

PATRICIA: Nay, my husband, I should not mind. For it I would but love thee the more.

ZACCHAEUS (turning to Matthew at window) Matthew, thou hast not said whether thy Master would help a man who hath sentenced his own son to knavery and death? (his hope rising through sorrow and guilt)

MATTHEW: (coming forward)ⓐ Wherever Jesus finds true sorrow for the doing of that which is wrong he is quick to forgive.

ZACCHAEUS (seats Patricia at his right on bench as Matthew seats himself on the stool at the right): Then he will help us to put off this burden which weighs upon us because of our wrong doing?

MATTHEW: Aye, and if I mistake him not, the greater love will be thine for it. "To whom much is forgiven the same loveth much," says Jesus.

PATRICIA (hope rising in her heart and voice): Oh, Zacchaeus, perchance the Master might be persuaded to see our Thaddeus. Matthew, thinkest thou he would visit the lad in prison?

MATTHEW: He speaks of God as a father and likens him unto a shepherd who leaves the flock to go out into the night, seeking the sheep which is lost. I cannot think that prison walls would give him fright.

ZACCHAEUS: (eagerly): Thou wilt ask him for us, Matthew?

MATTHEW: 'Twould be better far that the request should come from thee. And thou shalt have the opportunity. Hast forgotten that the Master bid me ask if he might dine with thee?

PATRICIA (the hope of a mother's love in her voice): If he would be so good as to see our Thaddeus! Then might our son know the love and the joy there is in life. Then Pilate might be moved - (She is interrupted by the entrance of REBECCA with MIRIAM who trips across the room to her father. Rebecca passes slowly and inquisitively past Matthew across room to exit at left. Miriam seats herself on her father's knee).

MIRIAM: Oh, Father, Father, dost know there is a great band of pilgrims coming this way?

ZACCHAEUS: Aye, my daughter. Thou seest Matthew here? (Miriam nods) He has come on ahead to ask that Jesus might dine with us.

MIRIAM: Jesus wants to dine with us? Oh Father! Father! (claps her hands for joy)

PATRICIA: Why, Miriam, what knowest thou of Jesus?

MIRIAM: I have seen him, Mother. Just now as we came home we passed many pilgrims seated by the way. Then we saw many mothers taking their children to a man who took them in his arms and spoke kindly to them. I took Rebecca's hand and we went toward him. When he looked at me his eyes were so kind I went right up to him. He put his hand on my head and asked God to bless me and to help me to be kind and good.

ZACCHAEUS (strokes her hair fondly): May God indeed so bless you, my daughter. But how knew you it was Jesus?

MIRIAM: Who else could he be, Father? His name was on everyone's lips.

ZACCHAEUS (turns to Matthew to ask earnestly): Matthew, thinkest thou he will give heed to us?

MATTHEW: Of that, my friend, I have no doubt.

MIRIAM (rising and tugging at her father's hand): Come, Father, for Jesus even now may be passing by. (Zacchaeus rises, as do Matthew and Patricia, and is led toward exit at right.)

A C T T H R E E

Time: Early afternoon on the first Easter.

Scene: The same. As the curtain rises, Patricia and Miriam are seen seated on the bench at work on a piece of fine linen.

MIRIAM (looking up from her work to her mother):
Mother, why art thou so careful with thy stitches?

PATRICIA (pausing to answer): 'Tis because this is such beautiful lines, my daughter, and should have nothing but the finest work on it.

MIRIAM: But men are so careless of their cloaks, Mother. Dost not remember how Thaddeus would bring his home all dusty and dirty?

PATRICIA (sighs, looking into distance, then face brightens): Aye, Miriam, but this cloak is for Jesus and naught is too fine for him. (Turns again to her work)

MIRIAM: Thinkest thou he will wear it when he is at Jerusalem and worships at the temple?

PATRICIA: It is my hope that he will wear it not only on feast days at the Holy City, but every day wherever he may chance to be.

MIRIAM: But Mother, thou hast not seen the crowds that press against him. (Picks up garment and presses it to her cheek) They will be sure to crush and soil it.

PATRICIA: 'Twill be enough, my daughter, if it protects the Master even in the least way.

MIRIAM (after a moment of thought lifts her eyes hopefully to her mother): Perchance Jesus may wear this when he visits our Thaddeus in Jerusalem.

PATRICIA: 'Twas his great kindness to Thaddeus that prompted me to make this cloak for him.

MIRIAM (looking at garment and sighing): It must have been a great, great kindness, Mother, to have caused us so very much work.

PATRICIA: And so it was. The words Jesus spoke to him made him want to live nobly and grow in usefulness.

MIRIAM: Did Jesus make Thaddeus want to be a fine, splendid man like my father?

PATRICIA (startled and hesitant): Aye, something like that, my daughter.

MIRIAM (working with new energy, nodding her head in emphasis as she speaks): Then Jesus shall have the best cloak we can make for him. (Patricia quietly wipes her eyes. A moment of silence) Why is it, Mother, that my father comes not home?

PATRICIA: 'Tis because he is celebrating the Passover at Jerusalem with Matthew and the other disciples of Jesus.

MIRIAM: Thinkest thou he will come soon?

PATRICIA: Aye, quite soon, for the feast days were ended on yesterday.

MIRIAM (anxiously): Then should he have been here this morning. (putting down her work) Mother, why doth he not come?

PATRICIA: Thou art too anxious, my daughter. It may be that he is delayed by the Roman court where he considers affairs of business with Pilate, the governor.

MIRIAM (hearing voices and going to window at rear):

Mother, why is it that the space beyond our walls is filled with poor people?

PATRICIA: The kindness which thou hast ever found in the heart of thy father hath brought this to pass, my daughter.

MIRIAM (running to her mother): Then they have learned to love him?

PATRICIA: Their love is akin to worship. And 'tis not to be wondered at, Miriam, for thy father has traveled far and wide over the countryside. Where there has been sickness he has brought healing ointment and herbs. Where there has been suffering from lack of food, he has replenished the empty barrels with meal. And when he could, he has furnished the men standing idle in the market place with work. Jesus hath wrought a change in our household, my daughter. And even as he hath brought peace and joy here, now thy father is bringing sunshine there where naught but shadow was before. (Enter Rebecca, excitedly). What is it, Rebecca?

REBECCA (wringing her hands): Oh woe, woe is me! Something terrible hath happened.

PATRICIA: Calm thyself, Rebecca, and tell me quickly. (Rises and goes to Rebecca, shaking her anxiously). Is it to Thaddeus or Zacchaeus?

REBECCA (shaking with excitement and fear): Nay, nay, my mistress, naught was said about them.

PATRICIA (leading Rebecca to stool at right and seating her): Then be seated here and gather thy wits about thee, till thou canst tell me who said it and what it was they said.

REBECCA (gasping): 'Twas the poor outside the gate that said it.

PATRICIA (calming her): Come now, Rebecca, thou art too much given to listening to gossip. Thou must not let idle talk excite thee.

REBECCA (with increased agitation): But our lives are in danger! We are all to be killed!

PATRICIA (as Miriam clings to her, Patricia laughs with relief): What are they saying now? Have they forgotten that the Roman rules and peace prevails everywhere?

REBECCA (protesting with frightened seriousness): Nay, but word is come straight from Jerusalem that all followers of Jesus are to be imprisoned and slain.

PATRICIA: What utter folly! Who, thinkest thou, would bring harm to such good people as give heed to that noble man?

REBECCA: 'Tis the Jerusalem Pharisees the people say. Already they have seized Jesus and crucified him. (Shudders violently, hiding her head in her arms)

PATRICIA (Miriam clings to her mother; Patricia is instantly sobered): This is utterly impossible, Rebecca, impossible! The Pharisees have no power to pass the death sentence and the Romans could never find anything amiss with the Master. (Zacchaeus enters right)

MIRIAM (runs to meet her father, crying): Oh Father, Father, they are saying that Jesus has been killed. Tell us it is not true.

ZACCHAEUS (whose face shows sorrow and grief): Would that I could! (Miriam sobs broken heartedly and Zacchaeus comforts her): There, my daughter, thou must not give way thus. (Takes her hand and leads her to Rebecca) Take her hence, Rebecca. (Rebecca takes Miriam and they pass out through left exit)

PATRICIA (unbelieving): They have crucified him! He had done no wrong.

ZACCHAEUS (bitterly): 'Twas expedient for Pilate to have the good-will of the Jerusalem Pharisees, so he crucified Jesus to please them.

PATRICIA: So - Jesus - is dead! (She sinks upon the bench(. Oh God, God, how couldst thou let so good a man perish thus?

ZACCHAEUS: As I stood by the cross, I, too, sought to know what was in God's heart that he permitted it.

PATRICIA: Did it seem to thee that God truly loved Jesus as a father his son?

ZACCHAEUS (thoughtfully, his chin resting in his hand) Aye, most dearly, as an only son.

PATRICIA: As a father, couldst thou ever be reconciled to see Thaddeus die?

ZACCHAEUS: Aye, if his death would cause other men to repent of their sins and lead an honest life. Methinks 'tis the way God the father would feel. And I would be like him if I could!

PATRICIA (slipping to her knees at Zacchaeus' feet and looking up at him with shining countenance): My husband, thy spirit has become beautiful even as his. I love thee more than ever before. But tell me of his death.

ZACCHAEUS: At Jerusalem, Jesus claimed the temple was being burned into a den of thieves. So he drove the money changers and venders of goods, letting them feel the sting of the lash for their dishonesty. (He pauses, thinking of his own dishonesty). Then the priests wanted to know by what authority he assumed to interfere with their administration of the

temple. But he did not falter in answer; not then, nor later when Herodians and Sadducees approached him. He silenced them all.

PATRICIA: If this be true, how dared they seek his arrest?

ZACCHAEUS: It was done under cover of darkness. A few temple guards supported by a weak-minded mob found where Jesus spent the night and laid hold on him. There was no defense. The Master would not have it. Neither would he try to defend himself before the High Priest or Pilate. There was no word when the soldiers mocked him and spit in his face. (Patricia draws back) Neither was there any outcry when they crushed a crown of thorns upon his head. (Patricia shudders as she lifts her hands to her head). 'Tis no wonder he answered nothing to the charges brought against him.

PATRICIA: It seems beyond reason that Pilate would condemn him.

ZACCHAEUS (vehemently): There was no reason for it. Pilate wavered. He would have released him but the crowd cried, "Crucify him! crucify him!" So, instead of Jesus, he released unto them Barabbas!

PATRICIA: He released Barabbas; that bandit chieftain? What, then, did he do for Thaddeus?

ZACCHAEUS (shaking his head sadly): Naught could be done. The custom is to release but one, and that one was Barabbas.

PATRICIA (despair in her voice and manner): So Thaddeus continues in prison. Oh Zacchaeus, it seems there is no justice!

ZACCHAEUS: Little did Jesus receive. Innocent though he was, they laid on him a heavy cross and led him

out to die. Would that I might forget that scene! (He rises and stands looking as though he were seeing it again at the moment). The hill top! The darkening sky! The hostile mob! The three crosses!

PATRICIA: Three crosses? Were others crucified with Jesus?

ZACCHAEUS: Two others; one old, one young.

PATRICIA: Were they followers of Jesus?

ZACCHAEUS: The younger, perchance.

PATRICIA (rises and anxiously draws near): Is this, then, the beginning of persecution?

ZACCHAEUS: Nay, those hanging there were said to be thieves.

PATRICIA: If thieves, then they were not of Jesus.

ZACCHAEUS: Of that, Patricia, thou canst better judge when thou hearest what was said.

PATRICIA: They spoke together?

ZACCHAEUS: Aye, the young man said, "Master remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," and Jesus answered "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

PATRICIA: No more?

ZACCHAEUS: 'Twas enough. All was quiet till Jesus lifted his eyes and said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

PATRICIA: Then death came?

ZACCHAEUS: Almost at once.

PATRICIA: But what of the young man? (He seats both her and himself on bench before answering).

ZACCHAEUS: Thinkest thou, Patricia, the spirit of Jesus lived in him even as in us?

PATRICIA: Aye, Zacchaeus.

ZACCHAEUS: And if our Thaddeus were to die wouldst thou be content to have him pass on thus?

PATRICIA: (fear in her voice) Zacchaeus, what meanest thou?

ZACCHAEUS: Woman, through his grace thou canst bear up under all. (Trembling violently, Patricia grasps his arm). Thou must be brave. The young thief who died there was a follower of Jesus. And today he is with Jesus in paradise. That young man, oh my beloved, that young man was our own son, Thaddeus. (Patricia sinks on her knees by his side, rests her head on his knee and sobs unrestrainedly.)

REBECCA (entering excitedly oblivious to the scene):
Matthew is coming! Matthew is coming!

ZACCHAEUS (rising and facing Rebecca, his voice hoarse and gruff): Well, what of it?

REBECCA (pointing toward direction whence she had come)
He comes running from Jerusalem!

ZACCHAEUS: Yes?

REBECCA: He runs like one afraid for his life.

ZACCHAEUS: His is no danger.

REBECCA (very excitedly): But they say we are to be killed.

PATRICIA (gaining control of herself): Hush, Rebecca, go immediately to the gate and bid Matthew enter.

REBECCA (still unconvinced): But they say -

PATRICIA (firmly): Go! (pointing toward right exit)

ZACCHAEUS: Matthew must have news he thinks very important to us, Patricia.

PATRICIA (indifferently): Is there aught that would prove of interest to us, thinkest thou?

ZACCHAEUS: Patricia, thou must not despair.

PATRICIA: But there is so little for which to live.

ZACCHAEUS: Nay, there is much, my beloved, much!

PATRICIA: I see it not.

ZACCHAEUS: Nor did I, God knows, till he helped me. And he will surely help thee, Patricia.

MATTHEW (who has entered right, unobserved, during Zacchaeus' speech): Aye, my friends, God is ever with his own!

ZACCHAEUS: Hail Matthew, what brought thee to us with such haste?

MATTHEW (buoyantly): Again I bring thee tidings of great joy.

PATRICIA (hopelessly): But Jesus is dead. He will never dine with us again.

MATTHEW (joy ringing in his voice): Nay, Jesus is not dead. Jesus lives!

PATRICIA (looks at Zaccheus questioningly) Jesus lives!

ZACCHAEUS: But Matthew, thou knowest I saw Jesus hanging lifeless on the cross with mine own eyes.

MATTHEW (with conviction): Other eyes, since then, have seen him not lifeless, but living. Jesus, I tell thee, is risen from the dead.

ZACCHAEUS (sceptically): Who was it saw and told thee?

MATTHEW: 'Twas Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. Toward dawn this very day they sought the tomb. They approached and beheld that an earthquake had rolled the stone away. They were afraid, but one in white stayed their fear, saying, "Ye seek Jesus. He is not here, for he has risen." As they were bid, they looked on the place where he lay, then with great joy, they ran to bring us word.

ZACCHAEUS: What is this but hearsay?

MATTHEW: But they saw him, Zacchaeus. As they ran Jesus met them saying, "All Hail!" They fell, trembling, at his feet. Then Jesus said, "Fear not, go tell my brethren that they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see me."

ZACCHAEUS: Art thou sure 'tis no more than a woman's tale?

MATTHEW: So sure am I 'tis true that I go even now to Galilee. Hast thou forgotten, Zacchaeus, that Jesus said, "The son of man must be killed but after three days rise again?"

ZACCHAEUS (almost convinced): Aye, so he did, and this is the third day!

MATTHEW: Then come with me, Zacchaeus, and tell the glad tidings.

ZACCHAEUS: This would I do with joy, Matthew, were it

not for the sorrow that death hath brought to our home.

MATTHEW (penitently): Forgive me, my friend, my joy concerning Jesus hath made me thoughtless of thee. (Goes to him, placing his hand sympathetically on Zacchaeus' shoulder).

ZACCHAEUS: Speak not of it; but thou seest I must remain.

PATRICIA (coming to Zacchaeus and urging firmly, while Matthew drops back toward the door at the right): Nay, Zacchaeus, thou shalt not stay, thou shalt go. Thaddeus would have it so, I know. Go!

ZACCHAEUS (drawing her into his arms): And leave thee in thy sorrow alone?

PATRICIA: Not in sorrow! (She lifts her head, her face showing that peace which passeth all understanding). Sorrow no longer weighs heavily upon me. These tidings of Matthew's have lightened my heart - they have brought me joy, Zacchaeus, great joy - for if Jesus lives, then Thaddeus lives also!

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